# The True Macbeth

*A Critical Essay*

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Last he imagines how the horrible wickedness of the crime will be enhanced in men's estimation by the acknowledged virtues of the good king. — Merit of the passage? Defects? Similar passages?

4. Criticisms and opinions of the class are called for.

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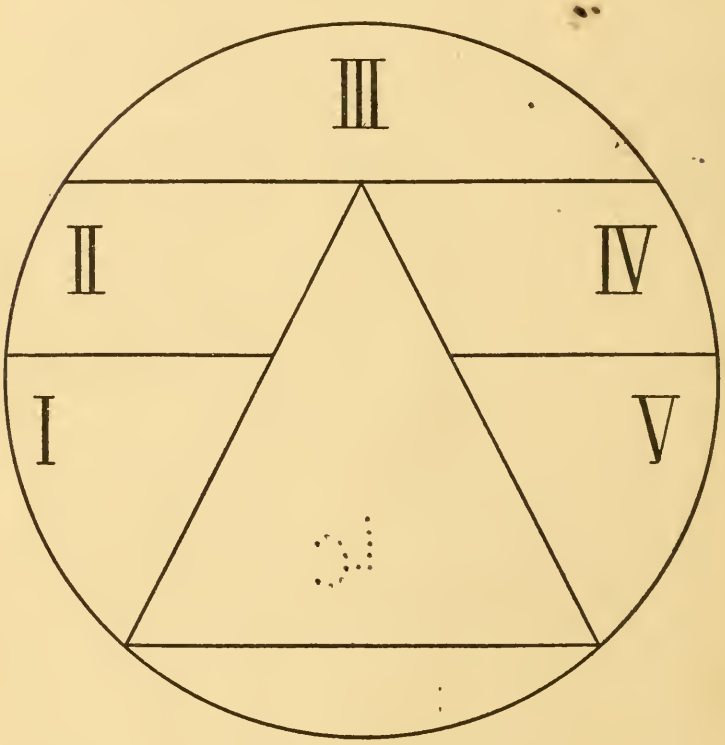
The foregoing crude treatment of this passage, supplemented by the judicious comments of the teacher, may illustrate what we believe to be one of the best possible exercises for giving fullness and accuracy in language and for cultivating the taste. The rendering of a celebrated passage into exactly equivalent words furnishes, to a large extent, the same excellent discipline that is afforded by translating from a classical author. It will be found, upon inspection, that our notes are prepared with a view to such exercises. Sometimes interpretations that are very nearly equivalent are given, in order that a nicety of taste and a felicity of expression may be developed in choosing among them. Care must be taken, however, not to push these or any other class exercises so far into detail as to render them uninteresting, or to withdraw attention from the great features of the play. It must ever be borne in mind that it is of vital importance to make the student *enjoy* this study.

# DIAGRAM FOR THE ANALYSIS

## OF ANY PLAY OF SHAKESPEARE, SHOWING THE CONTENTS AT A GLANCE.




FILL OUT THE DIAGRAM BY WRITING VERY BRIEFLY:

(1) On the outside of the circle, a statement of the Atmosphere or Environment of the play.

(2) Under the triangle, the fundamental Motive or Motives of the principal character or characters.

(3) Over the apex of the triangle, the Hinge or Turning Point, usually in the third Act.

(4) Extending down from the apex to the base, the Central Truth, Moral, or Lesson.

(5) Inside the proper spaces, the Function (office or use) of each Act, showing Introduction, Rising Action, Crisis, Descending Action, and Catastrophe or Happy Issue. Any scene may be similarly treated.

# THE TRUE MACBETH.

In a lecture delivered on the twentieth of November, 1895, Sir Henry Irving gave the following characterization of Macbeth:

> Shakespeare has in his text given Macbeth as one of the most bloody-minded, hypocritical villains in his long gallery of portraits . . . a hypocrite, murderer, traitor, regicide; . . . a villain cold-blooded, remorseless, with a true villain's nerve and callousness when braced to evil work, . . the mere appreciation of his own wickedness giving irony to his grim humor and zest to his crime; . . . having even before the opening of the play a purpose of murdering Duncan, . . . a wish and intent to murder, . . . a resolution that never really slackened, . . . a resolution as grimly fixed as steel and a heart as cold as ice.

There is ample justification for forming a totally different estimate of Macbeth; for conceiving of him as at first just, high-souled, ingenuous, conscientious, so impressionable, so full of delicate sensibility that in after years he could truthfully say —

> The time has been, my senses would have cool'd
> To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair
> Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir
> As life were in 't. . . . Act V, sc. v.

dreamy and over-sensitive, to the extent of hallucination and frenzy; so sympathetically complaisant as by and by to lose all toughness of moral fibre; a soldier splendidly brave, deserving the proud name "Bellona's Bridegroom"; yet an uxorious husband, so bewildered under the glamour of conjugal love and swayed from foundation principles by "circumstances beyond his control" (i.e., his wife!) that he could come to regard cowardly assassination as a "manly" act, a "great quell," a gallant "feat"!

Perhaps no man ever looked deeper into Scottish story and tradition than Sir Walter Scott. In his *History of Scotland* he asserts that Macbeth was once "a firm, just, and equitable prince"; but that "apprehensions of danger . . . seem in process of time to have soured his temper and rendered him formidable to his nobility."

From the historical setting which for the most part Sir Henry Irving ignored, it appears probable that in the bestowment of the crown a principle of alternation had obtained.

Kenneth (i.e., the handsome) Macalpine, having gained a decisive victory over the Picts in the year 842, became the founder of the Scottish dynasty with the title, Kenneth the First. Upon his death in 859 he left no son of military age. It being requisite that the king should be able to preside in council and lead in battle, Kenneth's brother Donald was selected for the throne. A precedent was thus set whereby, says Sir Walter Scott, "the brother of a deceased monarch should be called to the crown in preference to the son; in order, it may be supposed, to escape the inconvenience of frequent minorities." On the death of Donald the sceptre reverted to his brother's family, and Constantine, a son of Kenneth, succeeded. The alternation so begun seems to have become an established usage and to have continued for about a century and a half. We may even call it a part of the unwritten constitution of Scotland in those ages that the royal authority should be exercised first by a member of one of the two leading families and then by a member of the other. For convenience we might designate these collateral houses as the Malcolm branch and the Macbeth branch of the original Macalpine stirps.

But an end at length came to the peaceful transfer of the sceptre. Kenneth III of the Macbeth branch was assassinated. Constantine IV snatched the crown. In 995 he in turn was slain, and one of the Macbeth branch succeeded as Kenneth IV. Eight years later he too lost his life at the hands of an ambitious representative of the opposite party, Malcolm, who thus became Malcolm II. Malcolm's reign was long, from 1003 to 1033. He had no sons. His elder daughter, Beatrice, married Abbaneth Crinen, an adherent of the Malcolm branch, and became the mother of our Duncan of the play. His younger daughter, Doada, married Sinel, an adherent of the other branch, and became the mother of our Macbeth.

King Kenneth IV, whom Malcolm slew, was grandfather of Gruach. According to the old usage her brother should in due time have ascended the throne. But Malcolm had provided against this. He seems to have flouted the principle of alternation and determined to shut out the Macbeths altogether. To make room for his favorite, Duncan, he slew Gruach's brother. There still remained a worthy representative of the Macbeth side, Macbeth himself, who, now that Gruach's brother was out of the way, ought to have been the next king. But whether by

force or fraud or accident, Macbeth was passed by, and Duncan became king wrongfully. It seems possible that Macbeth, perhaps dwelling in the cloudland of dreams — for Irving insisted, and rightly too, we think, that he was "the greatest poet that Shakespeare has ever drawn" — was at that time too mild or pious or unselfish or magnanimous to engage in a fierce scramble or bloody fight or sordid intrigue for the golden bauble, and that he continued such for six or seven years; so that one who knew him best described him truthfully when she said —

> I do fear thy nature;
> It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great;
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily; . . . Act I, sc. v.

The historic outline we have thus briefly drawn enables us to understand why Sir Walter Scott emphatically declares, "In very truth the claim of Macbeth to the throne, according to the rule of Scottish succession, was better than that of Duncan."

Besides their exclusion from participation in kingly rule, other wrongs had been perpetrated against the Macbeths by Malcolm or his gang of followers. In 1020 Macbeth's father had been killed by Malcolm. Gruach especially had cause for hatred. Not only had her grandfather, Kenneth IV, and her brother, the rightful heir to royalty, been slain, but her first husband, Gilcomgain, had been shut up in his castle by Malcolm, the castle had been fired, Gilcomgain and fifty of his adherents had perished in the flames, and she herself with her infant son had but narrowly escaped from the burning pile. She fled to Macbeth. He received her kindly and married her. She is our Lady Macbeth.

Of course Macbeth and his wife knew that they were originally entitled to the sovereignty. They must all along have felt keenly the injustice done them. What more natural than that they should hope for redress; that this poetic husband should imbibe something of his wife's strenuous spirit, her inordinate desire for power, rank, wealth, or fame? The historian (Holinshed, Vol. II, *Hist. Scot.*) tells us, "Specially his wife lay sore upon him . . . as she that was very ambitious, brenning [burning] in unquenchable desire to bear the name of queen." What more natural than that now and then in moments of exasperation, brooding over their wrongs and perhaps smarting anew from some real or fancied humiliation at the hands of the hostile family, under her fiery appeals they should resolve, vow, swear even, that they would yet have

their rights and that she should yet bear the royal name for which she longed? We fancy that by such promises he answered her importunities and allayed her impatience, always postponing immediate action on the ground that

> Nor time nor place
> Did then adhere,

but assuring her that he would keep the matter in mind, saying—

> We will speak further. . . . Act I, sc. v.

It will perhaps be argued that as Shakespeare for dramatic reasons has omitted all mention of antecedent facts, we need take no note of them; that it matters not what Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Duncan, and the rest had done or had been before the opening scene. Why not, then, ignore that history altogether and confine ourselves to the text? Why assume an hypothesis not clearly advanced by the poet?

As a general answer to all such inquiries, we might say that by taking cognizance of prior surroundings, knowing the materials out of which a drama is built, and noting the silent deviations from historic verity or accepted tradition, we can better understand the dramatist's purposes and plan.

More than this. If we assume that in this composition he took for granted and kept in view some things of importance not specified in the text, we shall find it easy to elucidate certain dark sayings. Not to anticipate other and more striking illustrations of this point, does not our assumption of former guileless innocence on the part of Macbeth explain as nothing else can his inability to control the expression of his countenance? Does it not make more natural the utterance of strongly remorseful words like these —

> For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;
> For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;
> Put rancors in the vessel of my peace
> Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
> Given to the common enemy of man. . . . Act III, sc. i.

Is it not at least suggestive of the ground of Macbeth's former good repute and the love Macduff once bore him?

> This tyrant, whose sole name blisters our tongues,
> Was once thought honest: you have lov'd him well; . . Act IV, sc. iii.

Is not the influence of early religious training manifest in his many Scriptural allusions? Was not a reminiscence of the meditations of his better days and of his once keen spiritual discernment what led him in after years, when far gone in crime, to single out, though with an ironical sneer, a central

thought in the Lord's Prayer — the loftiest reach of Christian ethics — when he asked the two murderers, whose hatred of Banquo he would intensify —

> Are you so *gospell'd*
> To pray for this good man and for his issue,
> Whose heavy hand hath bow'd you to the grave
> And beggar'd yours for ever? . . . Act III, sc. i.

Seven years have at length elapsed since Duncan began to reign in 1033. How to get rid of him has been a problem. He is old; his two sons are mere boys; he may fall in battle; he may die a natural death, as Scottish kings have sometimes done; he may, as one of them, Constantine III, did fifty years before, quit the throne and retire into a cloister; nay, for he is an easy, slothful, good-natured man, he may abdicate in favor of his "worthiest cousin" Macbeth, or take other steps to secure his succession.

Right here it will be strongly objected that Shakespeare says little or nothing of apparent justifications or plausible excuses for the murder of Duncan. He must have known of them. He had his Holinshed open before him, and was three hundred years nearer these events than we. Why, then, does he not bring out the extenuating circumstances, or at least intimate some of Macbeth's claims to the royal purple?

Good reasons for this silence might be assigned. He may wish "to show Virtue her own features, Scorn her own image," and so teach great lessons; as, that crime begets crime; that ambition "overleaps itself"; that although a malefactor may be willing to risk punishment in "the life to come," believing

> God will forgive it soon,

yet there is a logic of events, "a Power at the centre of the universe that makes for righteousness," so that very often the guilty are punished here,

> But here, upon this bank and school of time . . .
> We still have judgment here; that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which being taught return
> To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
> Commends the ingredience of our poison'd chalice *
> To our own lips. . . . Act I, sc. vii.

Especially, perhaps, would he teach the danger in listening to evil suggestions, for Shakespeare is the prince of moralists —

> Oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray 's
> In deepest consequence. . . . Act I, sc. iii.

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* Note that a "chalice" is the consecrated cup used in the Holy Communion.

Again, Shakespeare's omission of all circumstances that might palliate regicide was the dictate of supreme prudence. It was dangerous in those days to suggest the slightest appearance of justification or even apology for violence against a monarch, or for blows directly or indirectly struck at royal authority. Within six years* five gentlemen had been hanged, drawn, and quartered for high treason, the overt act alleged in the indictment being the performance † of "A play of the Deposing and Killing of King Richard II." "Know ye nŏt," exclaimed Elizabeth in the following August, "that *I* am Richard the Second?" Shakespeare was not a fool.

Furthermore, in order to please the thick-skulled Vanity who then sat on the throne of England, and who among his first acts had appointed Shakespeare's company "His Majesty's Players" (one of the best things James Stuart ever did), it was politic in Shakespeare to remove a dark stain from the royal escutcheon and to leave in deep shadow all motives of Macbeth and his wife for engaging in hostile acts against Duncan. Accordingly, disregarding history and tradition, which show that Banquo shared in the guilt of the murder and that Macbeth had grounds of complaint, Shakespeare tickles the "Scottish Solomon" by whitewashing Banquo, the reputed ancestor of James and of all the Stuart kings, and, by contrast, blackening Macbeth, suppressing or minimizing all extenuating facts in his favor. Shakespeare had a keen eye to business.

A word as to the possible genesis of Sir Henry Irving's view of Macbeth. Sir Henry knew himself no berserker, but a refined gentleman. Neither in voice nor gesture, bulk nor brawn, was he equipped for grand, lofty utterance combined with robust, smiting, prolonged energy. He was often intense, but his intensity was of the intellect rather than the emotions. His voice, strong on consonants, feeble in vowels, lacked resonance and compass; his countenance, always interesting and often fascinating, was rarely kingly, never godlike; in his poses he was versatile, picturesque, dignified, but seldom statuesque and majestic. He knew himself a master artist, but that his art was Tennysonian rather than Miltonic, the art of Wendell Holmes rather than that of Byron, of Tom Moore rather than Isaiah, Addison rather than Carlyle, Joseph Jefferson than Tomasso Salvini. As Dr. Primrose, Louis XI, Charles I, Dubosc, and Mathias, he was perfect; not quite so as Hamlet,

* March 18, 1601. Sirs Christopher Blount, Charles Davers, John Davis, Gilly Merrick, and Henry Cuffe.

† Acted at the Globe, Feb. 2, 1601.

less so as Shylock, least of all as Lear. To illustrate with grandiose or passionate utterance a frenzied Macbeth, he would have felt himself helpless.

So, using what Dr. Horace Bushnell would term a "sufficient interpretation," he evolved or built from the text, consciously or unconsciously, a character he could well personate, an Irvingized Macbeth — a singular creation — all intellect, no soul; with thrilling imagery, but no touch of heartfelt sympathy; fancy so vivid that he could make tears trickle down his cheeks, yet a spirit so Mephistophelian that he could chuckle over it as but sham; superstitious, but without religious conviction; poetic with his brain, but sly, snaky, introverted, hypocritical, intensely selfish; a devil turned poet, who, for mere pastime, "loves to paint himself and his deeds in the blackest pigments," finds grim satisfaction in "cultivating assiduously a keen sense of the horror of his crimes" [we use Irving's own language], loving to "bring to the exercise of his wickedness the conscious deliberation of an intellectual voluptuary," "so that action and reaction of poetic thought might send emotional waves through the brain while the resolution was as grimly fixed as steel and the heart as cold as ice," "playing with his conscience as a cat does with a mouse," if that may be called conscience which clearly distinguishes between right and wrong but feels no impulse to do the one or shun the other, and is incapable of genuine compunction.

Certainly Sir Henry constructed an extraordinary being, a masterpiece of ingenious synthesis; and on the stage he depicted it with much skill; but can it be that this combination of contradictory qualities — heroic in battle, glorious in poetry, yet false, cunning, cowardly, cold-blooded, stony-hearted, unscrupulous, hypocritical — is the Macbeth of Shakespeare?

Sir Henry rang the changes on Macbeth's poetic imagination divorced from tender sensibility. "He was a poet with his brain," said Sir Henry, "the greatest poet that Shakespeare has ever drawn, and a villain with his heart." The statement is more than a paradox. Poets and villains, thank God, have absolutely nothing in common.

The play opens with a witch scene, twelve short lines. Amid thunder and lightning, the din of battle, air thick with fog and filthy with smoke of gunpowder, the three weird sisters indicate the weather, the time, place, and person, for their next meeting; also two of their familiar spirits, their own character, and their airy flights.

Why this witch scene? "To strike the keynote," says Coleridge. Supernatural powers of evil are to pervade the

environment and to be felt by Macbeth every moment. The sorcery and incantations

> Shall raise such artificial sprites
> As by the strength of their illusion
> Shall draw him on to his confusion. . . . Act III, sc. v.

But if Irving was correct in his conception — that is, if Macbeth's character is the same from first to last — then there is no need of any influx of the supernatural, no *raison d'être* of witches, ghosts, or apparitions.

Many critics, however, insist with Gervinus that the supposed supernatural phenomena are merely subjective, the figments of an overwrought brain, like the air-drawn dagger of which Macbeth concludes —

> There's no such thing:
> It is the bloody business which informs
> Thus to mine eyes. . . . Act II, sc. i.

You will recall Lowell's lines in the Ghost-Seer —

> Ye, who, passing graves by night,
> Glance not to the left or right
> Lest a spirit should arise
> Cold and white to meet your eyes,
> Some weak phantom *which your doubt*
> *Shapes upon the dark without*
> *From the dark within.*

Certainly we may thus account for the air-drawn dagger and for Banquo's ghost; possibly for the apparitions in the caldron scene; but no theory of subjectivity can quite explain away the weird sisters. They are as distinctly visible and audible to the matter-of-fact Banquo as to the vision-haunted Macbeth.

In the second scene Macbeth's brilliant heroism is set forth. In two savagely-fought battles he is bravest of the brave. Sir Henry seemed to forget that this heroism strongly militates against his theory. A famous warrior once said, "The worse the man, the better the soldier." In a bad cause it may be true. But in a just cause, in a war not of "forcible annexation" or "criminal aggression," but of direst necessity and strictest self-defence — the only war that is ever excusable — where the commander in the field will make no "howling wilderness," nor wink at torture, nor permit unkindness towards women, children, non-combatants, or prisoners, in such a war

> The bravest are the tenderest,
> The loving are the daring.

Says the blameless knight Sir Galahad —

> My good blade cleaves the casques of men;
> My tough lance thrusteth sure;
> My strength is as the strength of ten,
> Because my heart is pure.

"I selected men," said Cromwell, "who made some conscience of what they did, and they were never beaten."

Sir Henry conceded to Macbeth a full share of what he termed "this great manly quality," bravery in battle; but he afterwards styled it "the physical heroism of those born to kill." Surely it was at first something better than that.

*A priori*, then, from Macbeth's magnificent conduct in face of the greatest dangers we have a right to infer his original high character.

Again, notice that if this embodiment of "Justice with valor armed" had been at heart an unscrupulous hypocrite and traitor, as Sir Henry insisted that he was, he could at the outset unquestionably have made such terms either with the rebels or with the invading Norwegians as would at once have seated him on the throne; or afterwards, if he had so chosen, being of the royal blood and the head of an army flushed with victory, having twice in one day by performing prodigies of valor saved Scotland and Scotland's king, he could immediately have demanded the crown of Duncan. He does nothing of the kind. He behaves like a patriot and a Christian; he is loyal to his king.

In the last part of this scene, the secret treason of the thane of Cawdor is mentioned, and Duncan awards his title to Macbeth —

> No more that thane of Cawdor shall deceive
> Our bosom interest: go, pronounce his present death,
> And with his former title greet Macbeth.

In the third scene the weird sisters reappear. They tell of their petty spite and supernatural power. Immediately after this, Macbeth and Banquo, on their way towards the king at Forres, come face to face with them. The sharp-sighted Banquo sees them first. Macbeth, we presume, is in poetic reverie. On the following dozen or fifteen lines much depends —

*Enter* MACBETH *and* BANQUO.

> *Macbeth.* So foul and fair a day I have not seen.
> *Banquo.* How far is't call'd to Forres? What are these
> So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
> That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
> And yet are on 't? — Live you? or are you aught
> That man may question? You seem to understand me,

By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips: you should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so.

*Macbeth.* Speak, if you can: what are you.
*First Witch.* All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!
*Second Witch.* All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!
*Third Witch.* All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!

Here are two predictions: he is already thane of Glamis; he shall be thane of Cawdor; and he shall be king. We should naturally suppose that joy would have filled his heart and shone in his eyes. His dream of sovereignty for himself and wife is to come true. At least, if he had been wickedly ambitious and unprincipled, a smile would have lit up his countenance for an instant. Instead, his heart palpitates; his hair stands on end; fear, terror overspreads his visage. The quick-eyed Banquo perceives it and wonderingly asks —

Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair?

We may well ask the same question — Why did he?

The answer is obvious if our conception of the original character of Macbeth is correct, not otherwise. Macbeth has a right to be king; wishes it at least for his wife's sake; but thus far he has been able to see no short, sure way except by murdering Duncan. From such a foul, cruel, damnable step, "to wade through slaughter to a throne"; from that vision of fiendish assassination perpetrated by his own sword, or by the "keen knife" in his wife's "little hand";* from that bloody spectacle which the witches have conjured up again, his soul, not yet hardened, recoils with horror. He tells us so. In the latter part of this same scene, all alone, thinking audibly, he speaks of yielding for a few seconds to the contemplation of the fearful deed; but he instantly shrinks from it dazed with unspeakable dread, blaming himself for entertaining even for a moment the accursed thought —

Why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings:
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not.

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* That my keen knife see not the wound it makes. . . . Act I, sc. v.
All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. . . . Act V, sc. i.

In what other way can we account for this singular manifestation of extreme fright and loathing?

Banquo challenges the witches to speak to him. They tell him he shall be the father of kings, though not be king himself. They vanish.

Without delay comes a surprising fulfilment of one of the witches' predictions. It is introduced with rhetorical skill, so as to make a fine climax. Messengers from the king arrive.

*Enter* Ross *and* Angus.

*Ross.* The king hath happily received, Macbeth,
The news of thy success; and when he reads
Thy personal venture in the rebels' fight,
His wonders and his praises do contend
Which should be thine or his.

The last six words, "Which should be thine or his," have been a standing puzzle. "Commentators," remarks Hudson, "have tugged mighty hard to wring a coherent and intelligible meaning out of the old reading, and I have tugged mighty hard to understand their explanations; but all the hard tugging has been in vain." Our interpretation, first published in a magazine twenty-two years ago,* is as follows: Ross and Angus appear to think the magnanimous Duncan contemplates abdicating in favor of his heroic cousin. "Which thing — be it wealth, power, the forfeited thanedom, the throne itself — shall the king retain? Which thing shall he give to Macbeth?" The idea of so serious a step as abdication might well make him pause in silence. Ross adds —

Silenced with that,
In viewing o'er the rest o' the selfsame day,
He finds thee in the stout Norweyan ranks,
Nothing afeared of what thyself didst make,
Strange images of Death.

Angus speaks —

We are sent
To give thee from our royal master thanks;
Only to herald thee into his sight,
Not pay thee.

Ross chimes in with the significant words —

And for an earnest of a greater honor,
He bade me from him call thee thane of Cawdor:
In which addition, hail, most worthy thane!
For it is thine.

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* *Education*, May, 1887.

"An earnest of a greater honor"! Macbeth must have mused — What can that "greater honor" be, what but the crown itself?

Here it is interesting to note an odd blunder. When the weird sisters hailed Macbeth thane of Glamis, thane of Cawdor, and future king, he replied —

> the thane of Cawdor lives,
> A prosperous gentleman;

This is said to the witches. But Sir Henry Irving, copying Dr. Samuel Johnson's mistake, pronounced this statement of Macbeth's a proof of his hypocrisy! "Cawdor," he said, "had been conquered in battle fighting against his king and country, and by the very man who spoke of him as prosperous." Professor Henry Morley well says, "It not only does not appear that Cawdor was taken prisoner in the battle, but Shakespeare is careful to show that he was not in the battle."

To resume: In view of the prophecies and their partial fulfilment, what is the conclusion at which Macbeth arrives? It is a righteous one; namely, that he will take no steps to get the crown; he will simply remain passive —

> If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me
> Without my stir. . . . Act I, sc. iii.

Note his attitude: he is resolved to wait patiently. Herein the dramatist substantially agrees with the historian, who says, "Macbeth thought with himself that he must tarry a time which should advance him thereto [i.e., to the throne] by the Divine Providence, as it had come to pass in his former preferment." Shakespeare has substituted the word *chance* for Divine Providence, perhaps to please King James by making Macbeth less religious than Banquo. He concludes his soliloquy with

> Come what come may,
> Time and the hour runs through the roughest day,

evidently meaning, "No matter what happens, I merely bide the time; all things come to him who waits." Yet in the teeth of all this, and in pointed opposition to his own hypothesis of total depravity, Sir Henry queerly commented, "It is of the essence of evil natures that *they cannot wait*"!

In the next scene we have the king's effusive welcome of Macbeth, and virtual acknowledgment that he has fairly earned the crown. It is their first meeting since the battles —

> O worthiest cousin!
> The sin of my ingratitude even now
> Was heavy on me. . . . Act I, sc. iv.

What ingratitude? This: At the most imminent peril and by almost superhuman valor Macbeth has twice saved Scotland, and all his reward has been the petty title of thane of Cawdor. But if he has done only his duty, why this gush? The fact is, Macbeth's modest self-abnegation and perfect loyalty shine with as much luster as his splendid bravery; and so Duncan, as if ashamed of himself, as well he might be, adds with apparent sincerity —

> Thou art so far before
> That swiftest wing of recompense is slow
> To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved,
> That the proportion both of thanks and payment
> Might have been mine. Only I have left to say
> More is thy due than more than all can pay. . . . Act I, sc. iv.

"More is thy due than more than all can pay"! If this means anything, it means that all Duncan's possessions, including the crown, would be inadequate compensation. Our patriot warrior's answer is neat; we believe it sincere —

> The service and the loyalty I owe,
> In doing it, pays itself. . . . Act I, sc. iv.

Instantly the king rejoins to the effect that in granting the thaneship of Cawdor he has only made a beginning, and a very small beginning, like the first steps in planting a seed or tree:

> Welcome hither:
> I have begun to plant thee and will labor
> To make thee full of growing.

There is one way and only one in which Duncan can fulfil this promise; viz., by securing the throne to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

But within a minute Duncan dashes all such hopes to the ground. Listen to him as he cuts off the possibility of keeping his word and doing justice to Macbeth —

> Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
> And you whose places are the nearest, know
> We will establish our estate upon
> Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
> The Prince of Cumberland.

To name one Prince of Cumberland in Scotland then was like naming one Prince of Wales in England now. It designated him as the next successor of the reigning monarch. Sir Henry admitted that Duncan had no right to do this. It was a high-handed usurpation. The crown belonged in the other family. Well might Macbeth be enraged. In spite of settled usage and

of justice and fairness and the king's implied promise, the old Scottish rule of alternation is again to be trampled on. Besides, up to this hour, only Duncan has stood between him and his rights; now there are two, Duncan and the boy Malcolm. For a moment he is willing to strike down in death the much-promising, naught-performing usurper; yet even in the midst of his intense wrath he instinctively again recoils from the hideous spectacle. He whispers —

> The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step
> On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
> For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires!
> Let not light see my black and deep desires:
> The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
> Which the *eye fears*, when it is done, *to see!*

The king tells him he is coming immediately to visit him at Inverness. Now for the first time, as we incline to think, Macbeth plays the hypocrite; but it is only for a moment, his passion soon cools. To Duncan's rather unceremonious order—

> From hence to Inverness
> And bind us further to you,

he politely replies —

> The rest is labor, which is not used for you.
> I'll be myself the harbinger and make joyful
> The hearing of my wife with your approach:
> So humbly take my leave.

Meanwhile, as appears in the next scene, Lady Macbeth has received from her husband a letter in which he tells of the witches' two predictions, and the instant fulfilment of one. His care seems all for her, and the letter closes affectionately —

> This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightest not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell.

His wife's comments on this are of weighty significance; but they were wholly ignored by Sir Henry. She is not a dreamer like her husband; she is a business man. She and she alone has had abundant opportunity to learn all his strength and weakness. Recall now what Holinshed relates —

> Macbeth began to take counsel how he might usurp the kingdom by force, having a just quarrel so to do (as he took the matter), for that Duncan did what in him lay to defraud him of all manner of title and claim . . . unto the crown. . . . The words of the three weird sisters also . . . greatly encouraged him hereunto; but specially his wife lay sore upon him to attempt the thing, as she that was very ambitious, brenning [burning] in unquenchable desire to bear the name of Queen.

Do not forget that she knows whereof she speaks, that she is all alone, thinking aloud, and has no motive to misstate:

> Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
> What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature;
> It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way. . . . Act I, sc. v.

Too kind to kill the king! — that is her deliberate opinion. Plainly he ought to have more wickedness in his make-up.

> Thou wouldst be great;
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily.

This word 'holily' is strong here, as it is everywhere. It implies extraordinary scrupulousness as in the sight of the All-seeing.

> wouldst not play false,
> And yet wouldst wrongly win.

Her judgment is sound; there is no glamour of love or poetry here; he is devout and conscientious, but not quite perfect. No man is. He is willing to win by indirection; desires the end, rejects the means. He himself cannot kill Duncan; but if some one else should, he would not wish the deed undone. He is afraid to do wrong, it seems. She feels herself more daring —

> Hie thee hither,
> That I may pour *my* spirits in thine ear,
> And chastise with the valor of my tongue
> All that impedes thee from the golden round.

Here a messenger enters abruptly; tells her the king is coming to Inverness this very evening, and that Macbeth is also coming. Instantly her purpose is formed: without the aid of her husband, with her own knife she will do the work. She is master at home. She invokes the coöperation of evil spirits supposed to help assassins. Hear her —

> The raven himself is hoarse
> That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
> Under my battlements. — Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
> Of direct cruelty! make thick my blood;
> Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, . . .

> Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
> To cry 'Hold, hold!'

Note the words "*my* keen knife"! She will do the deed with her own hand, her husband not being wicked enough!

Hardly have these words escaped her lips when her husband enters unannounced. This is their first meeting since those desperate hand to hand conflicts in which he incurred such dangers, displayed such prowess, and almost single-handed turned the tide of victory. We should have expected from her some passionate expression of love, and of heartfelt thankfulness to God for his almost miraculous preservation from wounds and death; but there is nothing of this. We like to imagine that she regards him tenderly as a wife should such a husband; but there is no evidence of her affection either here or anywhere. He has pet names and terms of endearment for her; she none for him. She is his tempter and destroyer; but he never lisps a syllable against her; he is too chivalrous for that. She feels that "hell is murky,"* but she scruples not to imperil his soul.

It is not pleasant to say all this of the lady; but burning ambition and unselfish love and pious gratitude and loyalty to conscience cannot dwell together in the same bosom. Her eloquent words are solely to stimulate his efforts to get the crown. We quote the interview —

> Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!
> Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!
> Thy letters have transported me beyond
> This ignorant present, and I feel now
> The future in the instant.

He replies —

> My dearest love,
> Duncan comes here to-night.

She asks —

> And when goes hence?

He answers —

> To-morrow, as he purposes.

---

* Act V, sc. i, 34.

The added clause, "as he purposes," has often been cited as a dark hint to her that Duncan's purpose of departure is to be defeated by Macbeth. It is more charitable to regard it as the effect of an habitual care on his part to speak the exact truth. He had learned of Duncan's intention, which any one of a dozen reasons might cause to be changed; and he instinctively limits his statement. He no more intimates here that the king is to die than he intimates to Lennox in II, iii, 34,* that the king is dead. Why seek an evil motive when a good one will answer just as well?

She instantly responds —

> O, never
> Shall sun that morrow see!

This is no dark hint, but an outspoken avowal of her murderous design. It is the first time either has broached this enterprise to the other in the play. Probably, as she says this, she observes in his face an expression of perplexity, fear, horror, such as Banquo had marked when the prophecy of the third witch conjured up to Macbeth's overwrought imagination a horrifying picture of the king weltering in gore under an assassin's knife.

An honest man's face is naturally the mirror of his soul. Over and over in this play it is so with Macbeth's. It is hard for him to control his features. They *will* reveal his feelings. His eyes are windows. You may recall the description of Sir Philip Sidney in lines attributed to Spenser —

> A sweet attractive kind of grace,
> A full assurance given by looks,
> Continual comfort in a face,
> The lineaments of gospel books:
> I trow that countenance cannot lie
> Whose thoughts are legible in the eye.

What says Lady Macbeth as she watches in her husband's eyes the effect of her fierce, declared, unmistakable determination that the king shall be butchered to-night?

> Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
> May read strange matters.

See how she urges him to play the hypocrite with his countenance —

> To beguile the time,
> Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
> Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under 't.

---

* *Lennox.* Goes the king hence to-day?
*Macbeth.* He does; he did appoint so.

But his visage still betrays dread, loathing, anxiety, irresolution. Quick as thought, agreeably to her first plan, she at once peremptorily decides that the whole management of the bloody business shall be left to her —

> He that's coming
> Must be provided for: and you shall put
> This night's great business into *my* dispatch;
> Which shall to all our nights and days to come
> Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.

To this second announcement of her fell resolve that the king shall die this night, and to this resumption and avowal of her original purpose of killing him with her own hands, he is noncommittal. It is of no use to argue with her in her present mood. He inclines to postpone the subject as he has probably done many times in years past. He merely says —

> We will speak further.

She ends the interview by insisting again that he shall play the hypocrite with his face. If he will only look innocent and fearless, it is all she asks; she will do the rest —

> Only look up clear;
> To alter favor ever is to fear:
> Leave all the rest to me. . . . Act I, sc. v.

Early that evening Duncan and his suite arrive at Inverness Castle. Lady Macbeth comes to the gate to welcome them. Macbeth does not come. His absence seems to excite surprise, for the king asks Lady Macbeth, "Where's the thane of Cawdor?" To this she gives no answer, a suspicious circumstance. Where *was* the thane of Cawdor? Is it not a reasonable conjecture that this man, who wears his heart on his sleeve, cannot trust himself to look into the eyes of the old king who is to be murdered in his bed to-night by him or by Lady Macbeth?

A supper has been hastily prepared. The king and his peers are seated at the table in the great hall. Macbeth has come in for a little while, but has soon left his noble guests and retired to his own room. His absence excites inquiry on the part of the king. No explanation of it is given. All alone, thinking aloud, with no motive to be other than honest and truthful, Macbeth enumerates some half dozen objections to the murder; namely, though he has little fear of punishment after death and might run the risk of that, yet as a rule vengeance is executed upon assassins in this life; there are ties of kinship he ought not to break, bonds of loyalty, laws of hospitality; Duncan's virtues, too, "will plead like angels trumpet-tongued

against the *deep damnation* of his taking-off," for so he characterizes it; and, finally, there is no spur to the crime but

> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
> And falls. . . . Act I, sc. vii.

At this stage it is pertinent to note another careless misinterpretation. It was brought in by Sir Henry Irving to illustrate Macbeth's poetic imaginings, so realistic, according to Sir Henry, as to awaken a queer sort of pity — pity that comes and goes like a blush, bathes the cheek with tears, yet in a moment gives place to utter heartlessness. Quoting from the soliloquy the following lines —

> And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, hors'd
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
> That tears shall drown the wind.

Sir Henry made this singular comment —

> I can see the tears trickling down Macbeth's cheeks, as, in the image of pity for Duncan, he pictures the newborn babe tossed about by the tempestuous wind.

Here Sir Henry missed the point of resemblance, *tenderness*. He appeared to think that in some mysterious manner the newborn babe gets mounted astride a blast, is unhorsed, and is then kicked to and fro by the tempestuous steed! But it is not a babe's impossible equestrianism that makes every eye, *save* Macbeth's, swim with tears. It is pity, sweetly sympathetic and delicately sensitive. A like simile in *Measure for Measure* (Act II, sc. ii) emphasizes the tenderness of *mercy*.

Macbeth's soliloquy is abruptly broken off by the entrance of his wife. "How now! what news?" he sharply asks. She answers as sharply —

> He has almost supped: why have you left the chamber?

Well, why had he? Probably for the same reason that he did not go to meet the king at the gate: he could not easily and skilfully act the hypocrite, could not trust his telltale face, could not coolly confront the man he or his wife was to stab to the heart in an hour or two.

> Hath he asked for me?

Assuming that he must have heard of the king's natural, perhaps repeated inquiry as to his strange departure from

the dining hall, she impatiently replies, "Know you not he has?" Macbeth, seemingly nettled, answers with unwonted decision —

> We will proceed no further in this business:

She is angry. Are all her hopes to be frustrated? She sneeringly chides him for stupor, vacillation, sickly irresolution; feeble love for her; fear, unbecoming in a man who aspires to a crown. You will notice that she is continually harping on courage or the lack of courage. *She* fears neither God nor man. She would run all risks, defy all dangers. Reckless daring is with her the highest of virtues; fear to do a thing, right or wrong, the basest of faults. Duty is nowhere. At last she charges him with cowardice. This stings him. "Take any shape but that"!

> *Lady Macbeth.* Wouldst thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thine own esteem,
> Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would'?

His answer is noble, and it reveals his ideal, manliness —

> I dare do all that may become a man;
> Who dares do more is none.

It is well in reading this play to remember that, as Brutus's ideal, ever manifest in all that is said to or by him in *Julius Cæsar*, is false honor; so Macbeth's, many times alluded to by him or her in this play, is true manliness. But hers is sheer audacity. He had meant, Who dares do more than becomes a man is a fiend. In a flash she twists his logic, suggesting another antithesis —

> What *beast* was't then
> That made you break this enterprise to me?
> When you durst do it, then you were a man;
> And, to be more than what you were, you would
> Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
> Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
> They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
> Does unmake you.

Mainly on this particular passage, including the five or six lines that follow, Sir Henry based his theory of Macbeth's diabolism *ab initio*. "Here," he said, "it is definitely stated that before the present time, the subject of the murder had been broached, and that it was Macbeth who had broached it." One answer to this, as already suggested, is that doubtless the problem of getting possession of the throne *had* been broached

many times by one or other of them during the seven years of Duncan's sway.

But there is another answer. All this utterance of Lady Macbeth is the language of desperate recklessness and grossest exaggeration. Listen —

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 't is to love the babe that milks me:
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
> And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
> Have done to this.

It is safe to say she would have done nothing of the sort. So far from killing her babe at her breast in fulfilment of a wicked oath, we shall see that she cannot even kill her supposed enemy, the king, in pursuance of what she deems a good resolution. "Had I so sworn"! Very likely this is hyperbole suggested by, "My dear, I swear you shall yet wear a crown," or words to that effect. In the play, as we have seen, she, not he, has suggested the murder.

The twelve or fourteen lines of the speech just quoted are a masterpiece of brilliant sophistry. The plausible implication that he first broke the enterprise to her; that it was not fiendish nor beastly but manly to suggest it; that he would be still more a man if he carried it into execution; that his postponements on the ground that time and place were unfavorable amounted to a promise of performance when circumstances should be propitious; that this promise or vague assurance was equivalent to a solemn oath; that it was a pious act to take such oath; that it was not only inconsistent but weak and wicked to break it — these sophisms are so compactly interwrought, urged so swiftly and with such passionate vehemence, that her husband has neither opportunity to interrupt nor power to controvert. He can only interject —

> If we should fail?

She scouts the idea that "we should fail." If he will rouse his courage to the utmost, "we'll *not* fail." She tells how she will assist, and how easy it will be. Duncan will sleep early and soundly after his hard journey; she will meanwhile get the two chamberlains, body servants of the king, dead drunk; then he and she jointly can achieve the "great quell." She never calls it "murder"; to her it seems something heroic — "this night's great business"! Then they'll divert suspicion from themselves to the drunken officers of the king's bedcham-

ber. See with what care she has planned the whole to avert all chance of failure —

*Macbeth.* If we should fail?
*Lady Macbeth.* We fail?
But screw your courage to the sticking place,
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep,
Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
Soundly invite him, his two chamberlains
Will I with wine and wassail so convince
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only: when in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lie as in a death,
What cannot you and I perform upon
The unguarded Duncan? what not put upon
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell?

Macbeth is fairly carried away by this exhibition of nerve, daring, energy, ingenuity, and indomitable will in the woman he loves, fit to be the mother of heroes and kings! He exclaims —

Bring forth men-children only;
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males.

It is the suggestion of joint, not separate, action that seems to be decisive. With her efficient coöperation in shedding the king's blood and making scapegoats of the intoxicated grooms, victory is in sight. She will certainly do it alone, if he refuses to share in the exploit. Better combine their forces than leave her to try it unaided. Yes, he will help her carry out the "enterprise" as she terms it. He catches at her suggestion of putting something (she avoids the word blood) on the two chamberlains to make them appear guilty. "Will it not," he asks —

Will it not be receiv'd,
When we have mark'd with blood those sleepy two
Of his own chamber and us'd their very daggers,
That they have done 't?

Her answer shows her perfect confidence that no one will dare reject their theory; especially since they will make a great outcry when the deed is discovered —

Who dares receive it other,
As we shall make our griefs and clamor roar
Upon his death?

He resolves; the die is cast. He likes it not, but it must be. It is "terrible," but it is a "feat." He will brace up all his bodily powers to accomplish it. He will try to control his face,

dissemble his horrid purpose, and keep up a fair exterior; let her too play the hypocrite —

> I am settled, and bend up
> Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
> Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
> False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

It is past midnight. As a signal to him, for she still seems to take direction of everything, she is to strike a bell, probably to notify him that all is in readiness, the coast is clear, the chamberlains are stupefied with the liquor which she has drugged and given them, their daggers have been stealthily removed by her from their belts and placed where her husband must see them as he enters, and the king is snoring in profound sleep.

While waiting for the signal, he suddenly sees in the air, within reach, what seems to be a dagger beckoning him towards Duncan's room. He tries to clutch it, but it eludes his grasp. Blood-drops start from the blade and handle! — Act II, sc. i. Of course it is subjective; and, surely, a hardened assassin, "hypocrite, traitor, villain, cold-blooded, selfish, remorseless, with a true villain's nerve and callousness, a resolution as grimly fixed as steel and a heart as cold as ice, and the physical heroism of those born to kill" — [we are quoting Sir Henry's exact words] — such a fellow would never see

> A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
> Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain.

It is now past two o'clock. He hears her signal bell —

> I go, and it is done; the bell invites me. —
> Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell
> That summons thee to heaven — or to hell.

While he is gone on his deadly errand, she is listening. She has done her part and even more than she had promised: she has given the two valets what the policemen call "knock-out drops." She is herself stimulated, if not intoxicated * —

> *Lady Macbeth.* That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold,
> What hath quench'd them hath given me fire. — Hark! Peace!
> It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman,
> Which gives the stern'st good-night. He is about it;
> The doors are open, and the surfeited grooms
> Do mock their charge with snores; I have drugg'd their possets,
> That death and nature do contend about them,
> Whether they live or die.

---

* "Our sex is obliged to Shakespeare for this passage. He seems to think that a woman could not be rendered completely wicked without some degree of intoxication." — Mrs. Elizabeth Griffiths, in *The Morality of Shakespeare's Dramas Illustrated*, 1775. — Furness and some others deny the intoxication.

*Macbeth.* [*Within.*] Who's there? what, ho!
*Lady Macbeth.* Alack, I am afraid they have awak'd,
And 't is not done. The attempt and not the deed
Confounds us. Hark! I laid their daggers ready;
He could not miss 'em. Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done 't. . . . Act II, sc. ii.

We love to dwell on this last statement: it is a wonderful touch —

Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done 't.

She had gone to the king's room. Why? Perhaps to make sure that all was favorable; more likely, because she feared that some "compunctious visitings" or "the milk of human kindness" in her husband's nature might deter him even now. At any rate she resumes her original purpose, softly draws the chamberlains' daggers, advances to the bedside to stab; but in the dim light the face of the aged sleeper looks so like her father's that she cannot do it. She is not quite "unsexed" after all. She quickly lays the daggers in readiness and rushes back to her room.

In a few minutes her husband returns. In his excitement he has forgotten to mark the two chamberlains with blood; his right hand is all gory; in his left are the two dripping daggers which, like a fool, he has brought from the chamber of horrors; and he still wears his day dress, showing that he has not been in bed. Evidently he has foreseen nothing, made no preparation, taken no precautions, but left all to her. He does not even know who lies in the second chamber.

We call careful attention to the dialogue that follows. See if his conduct and speech are those of a consummate rascal; a cool, calculating hypocrite; a mocking Mephistopheles, who, as Sir Henry imagined, tries to "lead his wife to believe that she is leading him on," and "plays with his conscience as a cat does with a mouse."

*Enter* MACBETH.

*Macbeth.* I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?
*Lady Macbeth.* I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.
Did not you speak?
*Macbeth.* When?
*Lady Macbeth.* Now.
*Macbeth.* . As I descended?
*Lady Macbeth.* Ay.
*Macbeth.* Hark!
Who lies i' the second chamber?
*Lady Macbeth.* Donalbain.
*Macbeth.* This is a sorry sight. [*Looking at his hands.*
*Lady Macbeth.* A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.

*Macbeth.* There's one did laugh in 's sleep, and one cried "Murder!"
That they did wake each other; I stood and heard them:
But they did say their prayers, and address'd them
Again to sleep.
*Lady Macbeth.* There are two lodg'd together.
*Macbeth.* One cried "God bless us!" and "Amen" the other;
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
Listening their fear. I could not say "Amen,"
When they did say "God bless us!"
*Lady Macbeth.* Consider it not so deeply.
*Macbeth.* But wherefore could not I pronounce "Amen"?
I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
Stuck in my throat.

Evidently he is accustomed to join in prayer, not with his lips only but with his heart. Call him fool if you will, but do not call him a hypocrite when he is so choked with emotion —

I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
Stuck in my throat.

She with prophetic insight replies —

These deeds must not be thought
After these ways; so, it will make us mad.

He continues —

Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep" — the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast, —
*Lady Macbeth.* What do you mean?
*Macbeth.* Still it cried "Sleep no more!" to all the house:
"Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more."
*Lady Macbeth.* Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,
You do unbend your noble strength, to think
So brainsickly of things. Go get some water,
And wash this filthy witness from your hand.

At this moment she catches a glimpse of the daggers in his left hand —

Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there: go carry them, and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood.
*Macbeth.* I'll go no more:
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on 't again I dare not.
*Lady Macbeth.* Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers: the sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures; 't is the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal;
For it must seem their guilt.

Coleridge tells us there are no puns in Macbeth. We are sorry to say there are two or three. Here is one — "gild," "guilt." But there is a reason for it: if nothing else will restore common sense to her husband, perhaps a pun will do it. Besides, it is noticeable that, womanlike, she avoids repulsive words, substituting euphemisms.

She snatches the daggers, rushes to the death chamber, scoops up the blood with her hands, pours it on the chamberlains, lays the red daggers on their pillows, and hurries back.

While she was gone, there was a great knocking at the gate. Macbeth hears it and ejaculates —

> Whence is that knocking?
> How is 't with me, when every noise appals me?
> What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes.
> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.

Lady Macbeth returning from the bloody room seems to have overheard the last four or five lines. Reëntering she expresses her impatience —

> My hands are of your color; but I shame
> To wear a heart so white. [*Knocking within.*] I hear a knocking
> At the south entry: retire we to our chamber.
> A little water clears us of this deed:
> How easy is it, then! Your constancy
> Hath left you unattended. [*Knocking within.*] Hark! more knocking.
> Get on your nightgown, lest occasion call us
> And show us to be watchers. Be not lost
> So poorly in your thoughts.
> *Macbeth.* To know my deed, 't were best not know myself.
> [*Knocking within.*]
> Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!

What shall we say to all this? Must we not conclude that a good man feels he has gone fearfully, fatally wrong; and his agony of remorse is almost beyond the power of words to express? Yet Sir Henry declared him remorseless!

The next business of course must be to cover up the crime.

It was Macduff that was knocking so hard at the gate. He had been commanded to call the king very early. He passes to the king's chamber, and on discovering what had been done he rouses all the sleepers with his frantic outcries. Lady Macbeth rushes in with the rest, and demands —

> What's the business,
> That such a hideous trumpet calls to parley
> The sleepers of the house? speak, speak!
> *Macduff.* O gentle lady,
> 'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak:
> The repetition, in a woman's ear,
> Would murder as it fell.

*Enter* BANQUO.

O Banquo, Banquo!
Our royal master's murdered.
*Lady Macbeth.* Woe, alas!
What, in our house? . . . Act II, sc. iii.

Her "What, in our house?" sounds like regret not at the deed but at the place. Banquo's rejoinder, "Too cruel anywhere," savors of reproof. Meanwhile Macbeth with Lennox had sprung to the dead king's room; and, pretending to believe, just as his wife had planned he should, that the two grooms, whose hands and faces she had smeared with blood, and whose dirks she had laid unwiped on their pillow, were the murderers, he drew his sword and slew them both. Amid these thronging horrors, Lady Macbeth faints or pretends to faint. Macbeth does not move to her assistance as others do. It looks as if he thought her shamming.

The king's two sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, flee for their lives. This puts on them suspicion of having caused the murder of their father.

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are soon crowned; but they are unhappy. Very significant is her sigh —

Nought's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content:
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy. . . . Act III, sc. ii.

She chides him for thinking so much of Duncan and the chamberlains —

How now, my lord! why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making,
Using those thoughts which should indeed have died
With them they think on? Things without all remedy
Should be without regard: what's done is done.

They have terrible dreams that render him desperate. He even envies their slain victims that now sleep so peacefully —

Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstacy. Duncan is in his grave;
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;
Treason has done his worst; nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
Can touch him further.

But sorrow for the dead is blended with fear of the living. He remembers the prophecy of the weird sisters and is afraid of Banquo. Macbeth has a son, and like every monarch he

wishes his own posterity to sit on the throne. The witches pronounced Banquo the happier. Macbeth recalls the incident —

> He chid the sisters,
> When first they put the name of king upon me,
> And bade them speak to him; then prophet-like
> They hailed him father to a line of kings.
> Upon my head they plac'd a fruitless crown,
> And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
> Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
> No son of mine succeeding. . . . Act III, sc. i.

This thought intensifies his remorse. In vain has he defiled his mind, bartered away his innocence, his happiness, his peace, and his soul's most precious treasure for the empty, tormenting circlet so soon to be worn in triumph by no friends of his —

> If 't be so,
> For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;
> For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;
> Put rancors in the vessel of my peace
> Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
> Given to the common enemy of man,
> To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings! . . .
> Act III, sc. i.

To prevent this he plots the murder of Banquo and his boy Fleance. At dusk accordingly Banquo is slain; but Fleance escapes, to become the ancestor of the Stuart kings. Within two hours, at a great feast in the banqueting hall of the palace, Banquo's ghost confronts Macbeth, invisible to all but him, though shown on the stage in Shakespeare's theatre before Shakespeare's death.* The scene is one of the greatest in literature. Its immediate effect is decisive. Until this hour he may have intended to become an upright king. Now he professes utter selfishness as his rule of action —

> I will to-morrow,
> And betimes I will, to the weird sisters:
> More shall they speak, for now I am bent to know,
> By the worst means, the worst. For mine own good
> All causes shall give away: I am in blood
> Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er. . . . Act III, sc. iv.

His downward career has been swift, crime begetting crime.

> Facilis descensus Averno;
> Sed revocare gradum, superasque evadere ad auras,
> Hoc opus, hic labor est.

---

* So seen at the Globe Theatre by Dr. Simon Forman, April 20, 1610, and described by him in his diary.

Early next morning he visits the weird sisters. He hates them, they have made him wretched; but he needs them, and he believes them. They tantalize him; raise apparitions that lead him to fancy himself invincible; but they at length lift the veil of futurity and show him in vision eight kings crowned, all descendants of Banquo. Then they mock him with music and dancing, and vanish. He is almost frenzied. At that instant tidings come that Macduff, who had bluntly refused to attend the banquet, has fled to England. In revenge Macbeth plans and perpetrates the massacre of Macduff's household —

> Wife, children, servants, all
> That could be found. . . . Act IV, sc. iii.

As we have seen, for his first murder he could plead some excuse, a claim of right; for the second, the slaughter of the two chamberlains, he could urge that it was done on impulse without premeditation; for the third, that of Banquo, he could say that he was blinded by parental love; but of the butchery of Lady Macduff and her little ones there could be no palliation, no hope of possible advantage either to himself or to any one else. It is wickedness for its own sake. He has adopted Satan's rule of action in *Paradise Lost*, the canon of deviltry —

> Evil, be thou my good: by thee at least
> Divided empire with heaven's King I hold.

It is a fatal plunge; he can sink no deeper; he has touched bottom. Even his love for his wife departs. She dies, and he is angry! What business has she to be dying now?*

"While the thief is stealing, the hemp is growing." Retribution at the head of an invading army from England is advancing with giant strides.

In the battle which follows, Macbeth, confident of the truth of the witch's prediction —

> None of woman born
> Shall harm Macbeth,

believes his sword, like Arthur's Excalibur, irresistible.

> But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn
> Brandish'd by man that's of a woman born. . . . Act V, sc. vii.

Face to face with Macduff, whose family he has so cruelly and causelessly murdered, remorse for a moment paralyzes his

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* *Macbeth.* She *should* have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word. . . . Act V, sc. v.

arm, and he would not slay him. Is it a last flicker of expiring goodness, or a momentary revivification of a once glorious chivalry?

> Of all men else I have avoided thee:
> But get thee back; my soul is too much charg'd
> With blood of thine already. . . . Act V, sc. viii.

Macduff replies —

> I have no words;
> My voice is in my sword, thou bloodier villain
> Than terms can give thee out!

They fight; neither gains any advantage. After the fashion of the heroic ages, they pause for breath. Macbeth speaks —

> Thou losest labor.
> As easy mayst thou the intrenchant air
> With thy keen sword impress as make me bleed:
> Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests;
> I bear a charmed life, which must not yield
> To one of woman born.

Macduff responds —

> Despair thy charm,
> And let the angel whom thou still hast serv'd
> Tell thee Macduff was from his mother's womb
> Untimely ripp'd!

Macbeth's former ideal, manliness of soul based on genuine goodness, has given place to mere animal courage based on the witches' assurance of invulnerability. Even that fails him now, when told that Macduff was never born —

> *Macbeth.* Accursed be that tongue that tells me so,
> For it hath cow'd my better part of man!
> And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd,
> That palter with us in a double sense;
> That keep the word of promise to our ear,
> And break it to our hope. — I'll not fight with thee.

Macduff retorts —

> Then yield thee, coward,
> And live to be the show and gaze o' the time:
> We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
> Painted upon a pole, and underwrit,
> "Here may you see the tyrant."

But the animal instinct for fight returns. Macbeth shouts —

> I will not yield,
> To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
> And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
> Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,
> And thou oppos'd, being of no woman born,
> Yet I will try the last. Before my body
> I throw my warlike shield: lay on, Macduff,
> And damn'd be him that first cries "Hold, enough!"

This spirit is not what Sir Henry called "the great, manly quality of heroism." It is less characteristic of man than of beast. Wolves have it; devils, they say, have it. For some time Macbeth has been growing more or less than man, a demon or a brute. He is still strong in intellect, still proud of heart; but of the angelic only the low ability to fight desperately and die fearlessly is left.

The gist of the play, then, is the utter perdition of a great and gifted soul, through yielding to successive temptations, crime begetting crime.

> Of all we loved and honored, nought
> Save power remains,
> A fallen angel's pride of thought
> Still strong in chains.
>
> All else is gone: from those great eyes
> The soul is fled.
> When faith is lost, and honor dies,
> The man is dead.

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